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LINK NEWS

Helping Youth Engage in the World



A case study of young online news users

Research and report by



With support from



LINK NEWS:

Helping Youth Engage in the World

Link Media has launched a new video website that aggregates world news, documentaries and related content. The **Link News** platform employs live semantic search to connect to relevant videos, articles, and opportunities for the user to take action. In 2010-11, Link conducted primary research with young people in the San Francisco Bay Area and nationwide to guide development of the video news portal. This study was produced with generous support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

The findings described in the following report are summarized below.

Key Findings

The news matters to young people • Accessing the news is an “always on” activity • Young adults create their own mix of news flows and stockpiles • Being able to connect to community is important • **Young mobile Internet users are more active news consumers** • Heavy video watchers are more social with the news • Heavy news users seek out more sources and points of view

Web Design Ideas

Use videos and strong imagery • Aggregate, but be source-aware • Offer users an easy path to different genres of content • **Supplement content with basic information** • Visually emphasize action opportunities

Overall Recommendations

Help young people find the relationships among international, national, and local issues • Create multiple story frames for the news • **Make users feel smart and empowered, not uninformed and dumb** • Branded news is still powerful • Don't design exclusively for mobile news... yet! • Find the right mix of multiple media

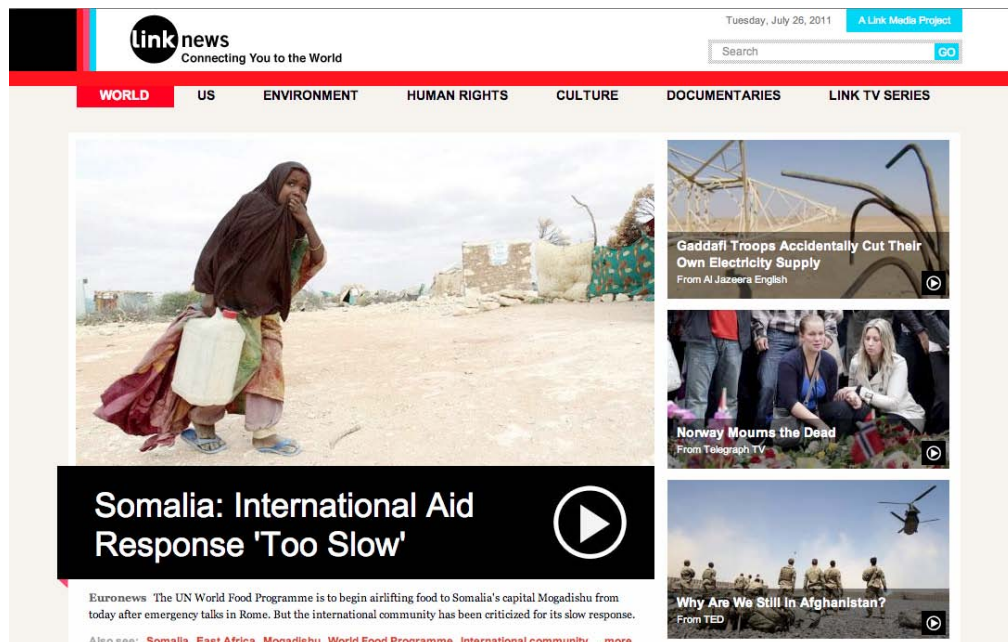


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Opportunity:

To Improve Youth Access to Diverse, Actionable World News Content

Several trends are intersecting to create an opportunity for better serving the youth audience with quality world news and information. The digital age has upended traditional media economics. Emerging technologies, devices, and applications have opened up new digital media ecologies for creating, sharing, and commenting on news by both professional journalists and citizens. Online sources for aggregating and searching news and information have made it possible to provide a broader set of perspectives on issues and combine different media formats, such as video, text, and audio. In addition, pressing societal issues such as climate change, social justice, economic instability, and globalization have linked local and global issues.

Young people are at the center of these intersecting trends. They are discovering and honing their abilities to connect to their communities and affect their worlds, yet the sheer size of the information explosion makes it difficult even for digital natives to find, understand, trust, and act on the news. The opportunity to provide youth with a richer set of resources for learning about the world and the ways they can participate in it would contribute toward a more aware and informed youth population.

Scholar Lance Bennett suggests that young people are developing a new kind of “self-actualizing citizenship” through their experiences of connection and interaction in the social web. He describes a shift toward more authentic and expressive forms of participating in the civic space and shaping governance.¹ What we see today as “apathy” among young people toward traditional political engagement may mask newer forms of civic engagement, caring, and involvement enabled by web-based, social media.

How do youth interact with media? What tools can news organizations use to reach young people interested in learning more about the world they live in?

1 Bennett, W. Lance. “Changing Citizenship in the Digital Age.” Civic Life Online: How Digital Media Can Engage Youth. Edited by W. Lance Bennett. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008. 1-24, doi: 10.1162/dmal.9780262524827.001

Background

To deepen its ability to inform and engage the young population, Link Media designed a new video website, Link News. The goal of Link News is to become a unique aggregator of world news, using live semantic search to surround videos with relevant content (videos, articles, and information) from other websites. Where possible, the site also provides users an opportunity to take action related to a story in appropriate and relevant ways, such as contributing to aid for Libyan refugees.

Link Media received a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in 2010 to build and test the Link News video portal for youth audiences to expand their awareness and knowledge of world news. During the fall of 2010, Link conducted primary research with young people aged 16 to 25 in the San Francisco Bay Area to develop a deeper understanding of their behaviors relating to information and news, and guide development of the video news portal. In 2011, the Link team leveraged existing semantic web software (from its ViewChange.org website) to develop Link News and allow users to link to video resources produced by Link TV and to related video and text material on the web.

This paper describes the primary research that guided development of the video player and website, and critical design decisions made by the Link Media development team that shaped the features and user experience of the site.

Who We Are

Link Media is an independent, noncommercial media organization whose mission is to engage, inform, and inspire viewers to become involved in the world. Through its channel Link TV, Link Media broadcasts to 35 million satellite TV households. Its viewers are young, ethnically diverse, educated, and engaged. Sixty percent of Link TV's regular viewers are aged 18 to 34. Link Media acquires, produces, and delivers global news, documentaries, and cultural programming. Through its own productions (Mosaic: World News from the Middle East, LinkAsia, and Earth Focus), broadcasts (Democracy Now!), and website (LinkTV.org), Link Media brings together its international news programming in an interactive setting.

Primary Research:

Youth News Media & Information Practices

Link Media conducted primary research with young people to learn about their news media and information practices, and how a curated video platform might support and add value to their news experiences.

Approach

The team conducted a national survey and two qualitative focus group interviews with young people 16 to 25 years old. (A more detailed description of the methodology is included in Appendix A.) The study surveyed approximately 659 young people in the United States about their digital media use and news media patterns. The sample was selected through an outreach effort with youth media and social action organizations across the country who posted invitations to participate in the survey on their blogs, websites, and Facebook pages. Many additional respondents came to the survey through general Facebook ads. The names of those who successfully completed a survey were entered in a drawing to win an iPod or Amazon gift certificate. Many respondents were young people who are digitally connected, active news users, and may have been likely to be engaged in civic issues.

While the survey sample targeted an important group for the online news platform that Link TV is testing, some groups were over-represented. Though the sample is not a scientific-cross section of America's youth, the results are nevertheless useful in identifying patterns among how young people interested in news wish to consume it. Focus group participants in particular tilted politically and demographically toward the San Francisco Bay Area's norms. A detailed analysis is provided in Appendix A.

The survey was launched via Survey Monkey on September 28, 2010 and closed October 15, 2010. There were 381 successfully completed surveys. In addition to the survey, two focus group interviews were conducted with 16- to 25-year olds from the San Francisco and Oakland areas to discuss in more depth their routines with online news media and practices using various online news sources.

Key research questions that guided development of the survey and focus group instruments were:

- How do young people use news media and information (traditional and digital) in their daily routine? What are their patterns and routines of use?
- How do young people value and trust news media and information across various kinds of tools, features, and sources?
- What tools and sources are important for young people to make better sense of news?
- How important are friends and social networks in shaping news patterns, finding and learning about news, and making sense of news?
- Do young people make connections between the news and their “communities” or the world?
- Do news stories compel young people to take action?

Key Findings

1. THE NEWS MATTERS TO YOUNG PEOPLE

The young people we surveyed care about their news. Despite a popular perception that young people are not engaged or interested in news, more than two-thirds (69%) of those who volunteered for our survey read, watch, or listen to the news almost every day or more, with 29% consuming news several times a day. Sixty percent strongly disagreed with the statement: “I’m not really interested in the news.”

Respondents were equally likely to use the Internet to get national (88%), local (81%), and international (80%) news and commentary. In focus groups and the survey, young news consumers stated they follow news according to their personal interests, yet these interests covered a broad range of topics (see Appendix A for a list of news topics). More than one-third of respondents (36%) strongly agreed that they only follow news stories about topics that interest them (an additional 43% somewhat agreed). Among widely followed issues such as politics, environment, or social justice, no single one stood out as the most popular. Sports, celebrity news, and business & economy were the least followed topics.

The young people we surveyed may be bigger users of news than a national average of American youth. In a 2007 national study, *The Future of the First Amendment*,² 25% of high school students indicated they read, watch, or listen to the news every day. However, since 2007 mobile devices have proliferated and young people are spending much more time online, which may have encouraged their news consumption. In addition, we chose to survey an expanded age group beyond high school students.

2. ACCESSING THE NEWS IS AN “ALWAYS ON” ACTIVITY

Accessing and keeping track of news stories is more of an ongoing, “in-between” activity than an exclusive, focused pursuit. More than one-third (36%) of survey respondents strongly agreed that they are constantly accessing news while they are doing other things online (an additional 43% somewhat agreed). Focus group respondents stated that the news is something they do while they are between activities, in class, commuting, in “dead time,” or on the go.

This pattern of news consumption demonstrated by focus group respondents supports the concept of “continuous partial attention,” revealed in 1999 by Microsoft researcher Linda Stone, a practice of

“I like watching a lot of history documentaries and researching past events. So it’s kind of interesting to see something unfold as it happens and try to think about how a similar situation has happened in the past, and try to wonder how it’s going to be in the future.”

*Focus group respondent,
20–25 year olds.*

² <http://firstamendment.jideas.org/>

using social media to maintain ongoing, yet incomplete, attention to the news of the day.³ The purpose of continuous partial attention is to keep an open connection and not miss anything. Various technology devices and digital applications, as well as digitally enabled workplaces, support the practice of continuous partial attention to news. Focus group respondents described using their technology devices and digital applications at work, in the home, and on the go in ways that help them keep an open channel to news.

“And then intermittently I’m tracking Twitter, Facebook, whoever has bookmarked some sort of article or what have you on there. And depending on if it’s something of interest, clicking on that. Maybe on a weekday I’m consuming... news intermittently throughout the day.”

— Focus group respondent, 20–25 year olds.

Fifty-five percent of respondents stated that they accessed news content from their cell phones. The most popular formats for the news were those that could be read quickly, scanned easily, or consumed while doing something else. Respondents reported preferences for short articles (79%), followed by in-depth text stories (61%), and television specials and documentaries (59%). Just over half of the respondents (52%) preferred short videos. Tweets (used mostly as pointers to news rather than news content) and audio podcasts were the least preferred format for news (favored by 15% and 17%, respectively). Focus group respondents described watching news and weather on the television as they got ready in the morning, and listening to news on podcasts as they commuted to work or school.

3. YOUTH CREATE MIXED MEDIA STOCKS AND FLOWS OF NEWS

Young people inhabit a mixed news media ecology, including traditional news media (print, TV, and radio); various kinds of websites that provide text, video, images, and specialized information; and social networking sites. The most popular media sources (with at least two-thirds or more of respondents using them) represented all three categories. Focus group respondents described how they assemble sources from each category into a personal toolkit to meet their news and information needs as they change throughout the day.

“I pretty much [read the news] every time I open my computer. It’s not a time-consuming process. It’s like click, glance, click, glance, and, if something captures my eye, I’ll stop and read it.”

*Focus group respondent,
20–25 year olds.*

³ <http://lindastone.net/qa/continuous-partial-attention/>

Top News Sources

Video websites (such as YouTube, ComedyCentral.com) ⁴	85%
A website of a national or local paper	77%
A television broadcast of a national cable or network news program (such as CNN, ABC)	71%
News stories posted on a social networking site (such as Twitter, Facebook)	69%
A news aggregator (such as Google News, Yahoo! News)	68%
A local newspaper	65%

Source: Link Media Youth News Media Survey, September 2010

The least popular news media sources were: blog sites of individuals and journalists (38%), magazine websites (40%), a radio station's website (38%), and user-rated news sites such as Digg (18%).

The survey and focus group data suggest that youth news consumers use a mixed collection of news “stocks,” “streams,” and “social contexts” to get their news. Websites and traditional sources provide “stocks,” or repositories, of news and information; aggregator sites (Yahoo! News, Google News) help manage “streams” or ongoing flows of breaking news; and social environments (Facebook, Twitter, and chat) also provide streams of news, but their value seems to be in providing a social context to help filter news and decide what is important to read. One focus group participant described this like a beehive, with everyone “scurrying out and finding something to bring back.” It is possible that some sources can be used as streams, stocks, or social contexts. Facebook can be both a social context and a stream. One focus group respondent described how she and her classmates used Facebook to push events and newsworthy information to the top of their news feed.

“And then usually while I’m making breakfast I have this app... that downloads this whole aggregate of news from my different sites and it goes by either one long list of all the articles or section.”

Focus group respondent, 20–25 year olds.

⁴ This response does not ask specifically about the content of videos and thus may over-represent the proportion of respondents using video as a news source.

This type of behavior has been well documented by other researchers who study digital media use patterns among youth. The 2009 publication, “Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out,” led to the common use of the acronym HOMAGO to describe the ways that young Millennials interact with new media. [The book was written as a collaborative project between the Digital Youth Project, UC Berkeley, and the University of Southern California with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.]

4. TRUST IS MODERATE AND DISTRIBUTED ACROSS NEWS SOURCES

Survey respondents did not have a widespread sense of trust (or outright distrust) for any particular news source. However, traditional sources seemed to be more trusted compared to social networking sites and some web-based sites. Only three types of news sources were identified as trusted by more than half of the respondents: national newspapers such as the New York Times (60%), websites of national or local papers (59%), and international news organization websites such as the BBC (56%). This finding suggests that some traditional news organization brands are recognizable as trustworthy across print and digital formats.

The rest of the sources listed in the survey were trusted only “sometimes” or “rarely” by respondents. Consequently, young news media consumers are frequently working to establish trust and credibility in their news. Focus group respondents described their need to “figure out” the news. They are always looking for the “agenda,” “slant,” or “bias” in the news stories they see or read. The news also seems inundated with celebrity news, extreme views, and opinion.

“You don’t let them feed you what they’re trying to feed you. It’s like you have to decipher it.”

— Focus group respondent, 16–19 year olds.

To cope with the need to establish a stronger sense of trust for news sources and their content, young people we surveyed used diverse sources to gather multiple points of view, learn more about a story, and separate opinion, bias, fact, and commentary. The survey asked respondents if they preferred to use sources with the same point of view as their own; with a different point of view than their own; or sources with both same and different points of view from their own. Two-thirds of the respondents said they prefer to see sources with points of view that are both similar to and different from their own.

“I do pay attention to who is posting and a lot of it relies on a certain amount of trust.”

*Focus group respondent,
20–25 year olds.*

“You learn not to trust only one source... I always try to have more than one source to get my information.”

*Focus group respondent,
16–19 year olds.*

Additionally, more than two-thirds (68%) reported using a news aggregator site such as Yahoo! News or Google News as a news source that provides them with multiple articles and links to related material. Often these sites are the default settings for homepages and allow users to scan and browse news every time they begin a search or access their email.

While being perceived as a necessary practice, using multiple sources requires effort and sometimes young people said it turned them off from the news.

“I avoid news, not only because... it’s really heavy, like substantively. Additionally, it’s like... you can’t just read one source anymore, like you were saying. You have to read more than one and you have to research. You can’t read any article. You have to read 10 of them to really figure out what’s going on with this one particular issue.”

— Focus group respondent, 20–25 year olds.

5. YOUTH USE FEATURES FOR LEARNING AND SHARING NEWS

A large majority (88%) of those surveyed reported using features that help them “learn more about the issue being discussed.” When asked to rate the importance of features on a news website, more than half (57%) of the respondents rated the ability to learn more about an issue as “very important.” No other feature was rated as important.

For survey respondents, learning about news included more than reading about a news story. Respondents used features to become more informed about news sources and their perspectives. They did this by using news portals to view multiple sources (68%), visiting other sites to compare perspectives (68%), and using social networking applications such as Twitter and Facebook to access multiple perspectives and share news with their peers (73%). Features that supported sharing and using social networks as a filter on news were used more often than ratings, trends, and profiles.

“I Twitter a lot because you can set up different lists to involve a lot of different people. And you can actually even set up an international news section that will have Al-Jazeera English; it will have Le Monde, BBC, Foreign Policy Magazine, The Economist, those kinds of things. And then you can have another one for just environmental issues, which are important to me.”

— Focus group respondent, 20–25 year olds.

“We live in such an eventful world and there is something happening on the East Coast and the West Coast and tons of stuff happening outside the United States. And I think it’s your friends and the people you go to on Facebook or Twitter that help you funnel down the news to news that you would prefer to see or that is interesting to you.”

*Focus group respondent,
20–25 year olds.*

While video was used on a news website by 90% of respondents, video was not rated among the most important features. Focus group discussions revealed that video was considered an important feature when it wasn't overly produced and contained rough or unpolished footage. "Seeing for yourself" through amateur video or roughly produced footage without voiceover allows the natural context to emerge and is perceived as an important direct lens on news for youth.

The following is a list of features, rated by frequency of use by respondents:

In the past six months, have you used any of the following features on a news and information website?

Watch video clips.....	90%
Learn more about the issue being discussed.....	88%
Watch live news and events	76%
Share news stories with others through tools such as email, Facebook, or Twitter	73%
See news and information from lots of sites on one webpage (Google News, Yahoo! News)	68%
Find out what other sites are saying about a particular issue.....	68%
Listen to audio clips or podcasts	61%
Access content from your cell phone, Blackberry, or mobile device	56%
Link to an opportunity to take action, such as sign a petition or donate money	53%
Follow a news site through Facebook or Twitter	48%
Learn what are popular, trending, topics on a service such as Twitter	47%
Make comments on stories	44%
Rate specific stories.....	31%
Make a profile to customize the content you get on the news site	25%

Source: Link Media Youth News Media Survey, September 2010

6. BEING ABLE TO CONNECT TO COMMUNITY IS IMPORTANT

The youth we studied want to be engaged in news issues. For survey respondents and focus group participants, it was important to be able to make links between significant world news events and their own lives.

Sometimes the way news is presented by traditional media makes it difficult for young news consumers to make this link. No matter how they defined their “community,” making a connection between news issues and the impacts on their community was a compelling factor motivating them to follow a story and possibly take action. Three-quarters (75%) of respondents said they were passionate about a topic or issue that they followed in the news. In focus group sessions, these issues included HIV prevention, homelessness, immigration, minority achievement, net neutrality, LGBT rights, budget cuts, water shortages, environmental health, and the military.

Just over half of respondents (52%) said that they clicked on a link on a news website to take an action, such as share information, donate money, or learn more about the topic. Only about 17% had not been compelled by either a video or a news story to take some kind of action. Twenty-seven percent said it was a “very important” feature (the third most important feature, tied with sharing news with others).

7. YOUNG MOBILE INTERNET USERS ARE MORE ACTIVE NEWS CONSUMERS

Youth who were mobile Internet users had a higher percentage of reading and sending email, reading web pages, and using social networking sites “several times a day” compared to those without mobile Internet access.

Mobile Access	Yes	No
Send or read email	69%	55%
Read web pages	72%	61%
Use social networking sites.....	70%	59%

Source: LinkMedia Youth News Media Survey, September 2010.

The active communications patterns of mobile Internet users seemed to carry over to their news consumption patterns. More than three-quarters (77%) reported sharing news with others on a social networking site in the past six months (compared to 67% of those without mobile access). Mobile Internet users go online to find news, share news with friends, and update their social networks. Two-thirds of them watch video from their mobile devices.

“I use this [mobile] app called Pulse News. It has top technology news, stories, and then sports. It has a column for the top stories overall. I just click on whatever is interesting, and then I read it.”

*Focus group respondent,
20–25 year olds.*

Percentage of mobile Internet users who use their devices to...

Update their social network	80%
Go online for news and information	76%
Text someone about a current news story.....	69%
Receive a text from someone about a news story	68%
Watch a video.....	66%
Download an “app” for news alerts.....	58%
Get news alerts sent to their phone.....	48%

Source: LinkMedia Youth News Media Survey, September 2010.

8. HEAVY VIDEO WATCHERS ARE MORE SOCIAL WITH THE NEWS

Heavy video watchers who watch video online almost daily or more made up just over half of the sample (51%). Of these heavy video watchers, more than one-third (36%) said they read, watch, or listen to the news “several times a day,” compared to 22% of light video watchers. They also engage with their digital media more frequently, including their social networks: 72% read web pages (compared to 59% of light video users); and 76% update their social networks several times a day (compared to 57% of light video watchers). When they are inspired by a video they see online, they are significantly more likely than light video watchers to share it with others (73% compared to 57%).

9. HEAVY NEWS USERS SEEK OUT MORE SOURCES AND POINTS OF VIEW

Forty-six percent of heavy news users (those who read, watch, or listen to news several times a day) had completed college, compared with 16% of light news users (those accessing news less than once a day). Heavy news users were also more likely to be older than light news users. Heavy news users accessed news about more topics than light news users and they used a greater variety of sources, including traditional print, radio, and broadcast media, creating a hybrid news media ecology. They were more likely to access content from a mobile device (57% compared to 47%). Heavy news users demonstrated a more intensive news practice: they actively sought out other stories and points of view. Seventy-two percent used a website feature to find out what other sites were saying about a particular issue, compared to 55% for light news users.

“I’m on the Internet at least 20 times a day, if not more. It’s answering emails, it’s Googling stuff, it’s everything. I’ll go look at videos on YouTube. I get a lot of my news from YouTube.”

*Focus group respondent,
16–19 year olds.*

Link News: Website Design Decisions

Design of the Link News video website was informed by:

- Insights from the youth survey and focus group research.
- Experience with software development from the ViewChange.org video website.
- Usability testing and additional focus groups in order to evaluate subsequent design changes.

Key Design and Feature Findings

A key asset in this project was the ability to redeploy Link Media's semantic web technology. The original software was developed for the website ViewChange.org, a site that uses video to tell stories about progress in global development. With the basic technology "back end" already developed as an open source Ruby on Rails plugin, the development of the Link News project could be dedicated almost entirely to design, implementation, and testing of the video website, rather than the execution of new features. The primary research was used to help confirm, prioritize, and refine features from the existing semantic web technology.

During this process of research and testing, key design and feature directions emerged. The following findings may be of use to media practitioners in the online news field who seek to reach young people. An expanded narrative of the design decision-making process can be found in Appendix B.

1. USE VIDEOS AND STRONG IMAGERY

Online video is an integral part of young people's news media and information practice. Over 86% of respondents watch videos online once a week or more frequently; 85% stated they use video websites such as YouTube or ComedyCentral.com; and 76% stated that watching video clips was somewhat or very important when using online news or commentary sites. In addition to video, photography can be used to interest the youth audience. In usability and focus group testing, users responded strongly to the images associated with the news. The use of striking photographs is an ideal way to engage user interest in content.

2. AGGREGATE, BUT BE SOURCE-AWARE

It is clear from the survey and focus groups that young people are comfortable with the mechanics of news aggregation sites such as

Yahoo! News and Google News, and are not surprised to be led offsite to different content sources. There was little confusion if clicking on a link opened a new window or tab, and users could easily return to the initial site. If anything, young people are eager to look at the news through the lens of multiple sources. In the focus groups, participants described their daily news reading habits as often revolving around aggregation or RSS reader experiences, and news aggregation sites were also listed as the most popular sites visited in quantitative research.

Respondents trusted household-name news sources more highly than their own social networks. This finding emerged in the survey and was confirmed by the focus group participants, who emphasized that trust was based on sources on news websites and sources (friends) in social networks. The most important factor was who was telling them the story, and their perception of that source's slant. Young people are very conscious of any perceived political slant in all media, although when prompted in the focus groups they did not seem to object to the slant *as long as they knew its nature*. Transparency about sources is highly valued, and perhaps may be more important to youth than objectivity in news reporting.

This opens many opportunities to explore the presentation of information about news sources. News sites that aggregate should clearly display source name and indicate that sections with aggregated links will lead off to different sites.

3. GIVE THE HOME PAGE A SENSE OF DEPTH

The initial design work focused on having a clean, modern look, with a limited display of highly curated content. In usability testing, users rapidly scrolled down and up again for an initial stock-taking. Because of the Link News site's sparse design, they weren't able to find the sense of depth and variety they were looking for, and their eyes were drawn around the page looking for a destination. When comparing the site to others in focus group testing, it became clear that a sense of depth could be achieved by giving key featured content more emphasis using bolder blocks of black and white and by dividing the page into clearer modules.

4. OFFER USERS AN EASY PATH TO DIFFERENT GENRES OF CONTENT

The initial approach was to guide users' paths directly to video viewing or topic exploration. In usability testing and focus group discussions it became clear that users expect and desire a news site to offer sectional navigation (world, politics, US, technology, environment, etc.) This serves several purposes. It makes users feel that the site is broad and rich in content. It gives users an obvious next step, if nothing else on the

home page grabs their interest. Additionally, if the news on the home page is heavy, it gives them an easy route to lighter content.

A variety of content genres are of interest to 16–25 year olds. A significant percentage of survey respondents (80%) indicated that they access international news using the Internet. While a slightly greater percentage of respondents accessed national news (88%) than accessed local (81%) or international (80%) news, far fewer accessed business (62%) and sports (57%) news. Humor and satire were also of interest, with 78% of participants somewhat or strongly agreeing with the statement: “Satire and humor are effective ways to communicate the news.”

In addition, participants’ definition of news was not always confined to breaking stories, which fits with prior research around issue-based exploration. In fact, breaking stories appear to open a window of interest in people’s minds about larger topics. For example, around a video about the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant disaster, the participants were highly appreciative of longer pieces about Chernobyl, the science of nuclear energy, and other investigative reports about nuclear power and the environment.

5. SUPPLEMENT CORE CONTENT WITH INFORMATION

“Learn more about the issue being discussed” was the single feature participants rated the highest when using online news and commentary sites. This feature outscored all others by a large margin. Eighty-eight percent of respondents stated that in the past six months they had used a feature to learn more about an issue being discussed. Nearly all (95%) of survey respondents said it was “very” or “somewhat” important to be able to learn more about an issue being discussed when they go online for news.

Users responded well when Wikipedia-like basic briefing information was displayed around the video player and on supplementary pages. Often the news is about subjects or geographic areas users were not familiar with, and they felt more likely to explore videos about those topics once they had read the text. Aggregation of external content (articles, videos, and actions) also facilitates issue exploration, as does the use of pages that collate content around a particular topic.

6. VISUALLY EMPHASIZE ACTION OPPORTUNITIES

Young people responded well to the idea of taking action around the news. Focus group participants said that taking action countered the helplessness they felt over depressing news stories. Taking action was seen as a way to localize the story by making it more a part of their

lives. However, opportunities for action are not as robust as youth would like them to be and often websites do not offer tools for engagement beyond donating money. More research is needed about ways of linking youth to opportunities for action and involvement that could improve their experience of the news.

7. VISUAL DESIGN SHOULD NOT BE PATRONIZING

Focus group participants appreciated that we designed a site with broad appeal rather than overtly targeting them with our choice of visual language. News organizations hoping to reach this audience should focus on the user experience, and aim for a visual design that takes current trends into account but does not overdo the youth tone, which can be seen as patronizing and “dumbing down” the content.

Recommendations

In developing the Link News site, we identified 10 recommendations for other organizations trying to reach the young adult market with world news offerings. These recommendations suggest additional research that may help websites better serve this audience with relevant content and facilitate young people's engagement in global civic life.

1. DON'T FORCE COMMUNITY.

Because of the proliferation of social networking communities, the users we surveyed did not want general news websites to create unnatural communities. Rather, they want to be able to use their own social groups and communities as filters and sources for news, and as trusted partners in making sense of the news. An effective platform would enable the integration and use of existing communities and social networks in their news consumption practices.

2. HELP YOUTH FIND THE RELATIONSHIPS OF INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL, AND LOCAL ISSUES.

In the national survey, youth reported about the same interest in news stories at the international, national, and local levels. However, focus group discussions revealed that it is often difficult for young people to find international news relevant. News sites and web tools need to help youth make connections between international and local issues. They expressed greater interest in stories that had a direct effect on their local community.

3. CREATE MULTIPLE STORY FRAMES FOR THE NEWS.

Many youth observed that important news issues are often multifaceted with environmental, political, scientific, technological, social, or economic perspectives. One news issue presented from a variety of perspectives could help attract and engage a broader group of young people. Allowing multiple entry points to a story may make international news more compelling to the youth audience.

4. DEVELOP A BROADER SPECTRUM FOR TAKING ACTION.

Youth clearly want to become engaged in the issues that are shaping their world. This is evident from their active news consumption practices and their desire for features that facilitate taking action. There is a gap between compelling and meaningful ways to act, however, and creating an area of opportunity for news providers. News providers need to develop

"A lot of times when you read a newspaper article you hear something negative. Then there's no follow-up. What can you do about it?"

*Focus group respondent,
20–25 year olds.*

a broader and more robust set of options for youth to take action. These include becoming more informed about an issue, sharing news stories, donating money and time (e.g., volunteering), and taking local actions such as organizing a boycott or supporting a local business, holding a community film screening, or creating a local action group.

Some youth expressed concern that they are not “activists,” but they want to become more engaged. Those who considered themselves active didn’t know what else to do besides donate money. Exploring a broader spectrum of activities and developing partnerships with public action groups will contribute toward developing new options for more meaningful and compelling civic engagement. This could become an important point of differentiation for news providers serving the youth audience.

5. MAKE YOUR USERS FEEL SMART AND EMPOWERED, NOT UNINFORMED AND DUMB

Don’t underestimate the power of providing factual information about news stories. Background information, historical facts, definitions, and other factual “Wikipedia”-like information help young people understand news issues better by providing context. The Link News focus group respondents expressed a great sense of empowerment from having factual information right next to a video. It provided background information that helped them engage with the story and not click away from it because they weren’t familiar with the story or didn’t know anything about the topic. Youth news users come from all kinds of educational backgrounds and their personal experiences create a range of understanding about news issues. Providing factual information will help youth engage more in global news stories and find the connection to their own lives.

6. BRANDED NEWS IS STILL POWERFUL

The youth we surveyed are very savvy about news sources, and use various techniques for vetting them: checking multiple sources for veracity of a story, sharing with trusted friends to gain perspective, paying attention to what sources are listed by a story, video, or article. Generally, traditional news organizations (such as the New York Times, the BBC, and The Guardian) retain a great deal of brand recognition and trust. Youth are able to distinguish between news organizations and news platforms: trust didn’t come from the story being in print or on television or the web, but from being reported by a specific organization. It is important to make source information clearly visible.

“[A lot of news sources] just think that their audience knows a certain amount... And I think that discourages people from wanting to read the news, because they don’t want to spend hours just trying to get a basic understanding of things.”

*Focus group respondent,
20–25 year olds.*

7. DON'T DESIGN EXCLUSIVELY FOR MOBILE NEWS... YET

While there is a high penetration of mobile phone users among 16–25 year olds, it is still growing and many do not have mobile Internet access. However, this is changing rapidly. Mobile applications for news were used and valued by those with good Internet access. But not everyone is there yet, and many considered reading lengthy stories on mobiles something of a hassle.

8. DON'T OVER-PROMISE WITH SEMANTIC WEB

Semantic web tools offer great opportunities to improve user experiences on the web by providing more refined and customized content. However, semantic web tools are not flawless, and meaningful curation of news stories still requires skilled human activity. For example, every day a news editor chooses the top stories for the main page of Link News and watches for trending topics to add. The editor also oversees the quality of the mix of related content. As in any machine-assisted search, occasionally unrelated stories or actions appear. News providers need to consider where semantic web tools can provide the most value (i.e., where curation can become automated) and where human curation is still a preferred and more effective method.

9. THINK IN TERMS OF DIFFERENTIATION

The young people we studied say they are inundated with commercial messaging in most aspects of their lives. They express deep frustration about advertising embedded in videos, particularly ads that precede videos, and celebrity news. Focus group participants said they value being able to be on a website free from the influences of advertising and celebrity gossip. This would be an important point of differentiation from other news sites. Focus group participants easily identified other points of differentiation such as the inclusion of topic information.

10. FIND THE RIGHT MIX OF MULTIPLE MEDIA

Video alone is not sufficient to hold the interest of young news consumers. They prefer having the option to watch video, read news articles or other text, and scroll through photographs and other imagery. Audio podcasts were less enthusiastically supported in our research. Finding the right mix of media formats is an area that should be explored more closely in user testing.

"It was really refreshing to see news that was just news and not anything else."

*Focus group respondent,
20–25 year olds.*

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<http://news.linktv.org/whitepaper>



Appendix A

1. Focus Group Interviews

We conducted two focus groups, one for each age group, to discuss media and news practices and how youth connect news to their communities. Each group included 10 - 12 participants in a semi-structured, two-hour discussion. Data from these discussions informed the design decisions for the video player and website, and helped interpret the survey data. The discussion protocol is included below.

Link Media Focus Group Process:

INTRODUCTIONS

1. Welcome

Thank you for coming tonight. I'm working for Link Media to help find out about the kinds of news and information media that young people use and how important it is to them. I'd like to have an open discussion, so please be as open and honest as you can. The only rule is to try to talk one person at a time. None of your comments will be connected to your name, so everything you say will be confidential and anonymous.

Go around table: Please tell us your name and a little bit about yourself.

ROUTINES: PROCESS OF GETTING NEWS/INFORMATION

Anecdote: 30 years ago we lived in a very different world of media. Newspaper in the morning, newspaper at night, and the 5 o'clock news.

2. Do you have a familiar routine for getting news and information?

Tell me about your daily routine for getting news and information?

Probe:

- Where are you? (home, work, on the go)
- Context? (relaxing, investigating, tracking, with friends)
- What media are you using? (paper, online, text, video)
- What sources?
- Local or global new?

Are other people involved in your daily news routine?

Probe:

Do you ever send/receive news stories? When? How? Why?
How important are other people in your news routine?
Are you known for the kinds of stories you share? Other people?

What would you say is your core “toolset” for getting news and information?

- Do you have a favorite set of tools, sources, or resources? Why?
- Particular devices? (online/digital, print)
- Particular formats? (text, voice, video)
- Particular sources or individuals? (trusted organizations, journalists)

Can you imagine a better routine for getting your news and information

Probe:

- What would it look like?

ONLINE SOURCES: TRUST, FEATURES

I want you to think about a specific issue or story that has been in the news recently that interests you. Take a few minutes and jot down on the card in front of you how you would use the Internet (go online) to find out about that issue or story.

After three minutes: Invite one person to go to the laptop and show them what he/she would do. Then move into the discussion questions. Have others keep adding information to their cards.

3. *Is this the way you typically go online for news and information?*

Why did you pick this/these online site(s)?

Probe:

What attributes or features of the site are useful to you?
(video/images/audio, social networking, links to related material, customization)

- Do you know other people who use this site?
- Do you trust this site? Why?
- What makes a site or online resource trustworthy?
- Are there other trusted voices that you rely on?

- What would you do to learn more about this issue?

How important is it for you to be able to share news and information with your friends, social network? Why?

Probe:

- Do you have a group that you regularly share news and information with? Who?

NEWS MEDIA AND ENGAGEMENT

4. Have you ever been inspired by a news story to take action? By action I mean sharing a story, volunteering, donating, etc.

Can you tell me about a specific news story that inspired you to do something or take some kind of action?

Probe:

- What was the story about?
- Why was it compelling?
- How did you find out about the story/receive this news story?
- What format was it in? Print, online, video, images, audio included?
- What kind of action did you take?
- Did you share the story? Who did you share it with?
- Did you learn more about the issue? Volunteer? Donate, raise money?
- What would have made it easier to act?
- Ever receive a news story from someone that compelled you to act?
- Were you inspired by local or global news stories?

Thank you.

2. National Survey

We developed a set of survey questions to gather quantitative data about young people's news media and information practices. We used Survey Monkey to implement the survey and analyze the data. Question topics included basic demographics, Internet and social media use, news and information practices, use and trust of various news sources, and ways of taking action in response to news. The survey questionnaire, with summary topline data, is attached at the end of this document.

RECRUITING

We identified several national youth networks to announce the news media survey and invite youth to participate in it. Typically, we posted an announcement and description of the survey on the organization's website, Facebook page, or other online presence. We recruited participants 16–25 years old from the following organizations and networks:

NATIONAL

- Free Press (PAID)
- Do Something!
- Campus Progress
- America's Promise Alliance
- Concerned Youth of America
- Mobilize.org
- Young Democrats
- National Congress of American Indians, Youth Commission
- United States Youth Network for Sustainable Development (SustainUS)
- Junior State of America
- National Youth Leadership Council
- Roosevelt Institute Campus Network
- Sierra Student Coalition
- National Association of Black Journalists
- League of Young Voters
- Institute for Democratic Education in America (IDEA)
- Green For All
- American Youth Policy Forum
- Up2Us
- The Media Consortium
- Alliance for Educational Justice
- Black Men and Boys Coalition
- Brower Youth Awards
- Global Youth Leadership Institute
- Young Invincibles
- World Savvy

REGIONAL

- Detroit Summer
- New Youth Communications
- LA Youth
- Greater New Orleans Afterschool Partnership

- VAYLA: Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association
- Third Wave Foundation
- YWCA Tucson
- Press Pass TV
- H.Y.P.E.
- Skrappy's / Tucson Youth Collective
- Growing American Youth
- Out Youth
- SouthWest Organizing Project

LOCAL

- Summer Search
- LGBT Community Center - youth program
- Lyric
- New American Media - Youth Outlook
- Youth Radio
- Colorlines
- 99 Problems
- League of Young Voters
- Ella Baker Center
- AYPAL/OASES
- Berkeley High Journalism Class
- Conscious Youth Media Crew (Bay Area)
- CELLspace
- Youth Movement Records
- Youth Together

ADDITIONAL OUTREACH

- Facebook ads: 1,225 clicks and 8,287,725 impressions.
- Link TV and YouthNoise Facebook pages, and partnership Facebook pages
- Twitter: 91+ clicks through the YouthNoise bit.ly URL alone
- Craigslist: Posted in 28 different U.S. cities in the volunteer section
- Additional websites: posted on A Contest Blog and Contests.com

The survey only accepted respondents within the 16–25 age range and those living in the United States. Survey respondents who were out of this age range or lived outside the U.S. were screened out, sent to a thank you page, and not allowed to re-enter the survey.

As an incentive to participate, we included all names from completed surveys in a lottery for the chance to win an iPod or an Amazon gift certificate.

Analysis is based on the total number of completed surveys (381). This is a response rate of 57.8% of the 659 respondents who started the survey.

SAMPLE

Compared to the national population, our sample is similar to the nation according to age groups 16–19 years and 20–25 years. Our sample is less representative by ethnicity/race and gender and includes a few biases. It over-represents females and under-represents males. It under-represents African Americans, and over-represents Asians. Hispanics in the survey sample are similar to the U.S. total for this age group. Non-Hispanic whites are slightly under-represented (see tables 1–3).

Table 1: Survey by Age Group

Age Group	Survey Sample	U.S. Population (1,000s)
16-19 years	228 (39%)	17,405 (40.3%)
20 - 25 years	365 (61%)	25,804 (59.7%)
Total	594	43,209

Source: U.S. Statistical Abstract, 2011 (2009 census data)

Table 2: Survey by Gender

Gender	Survey Sample	U.S. Population (1,000s)*
Female	273 (69%)	20,933 (49%)
Male	120 (30%)	22,145 (51%)
Transgender	2 (1%)	Not Available
Total	395	43,078

Source: U.S. Statistical Abstract, 2011 (2009 census data)

* US gender total based on 15–19 years and 20–24 years age categories.





Table 3: Survey by Age Group and Ethnicity/Race



Ethnicity/Race	Survey Sample	U.S. Population (1,000s)
White Non-Hispanic	219 (55.4%)	33,157 (60%)
Hispanic	68 (17.2%)	7,908 (18.3%)
Asian	64 (15.1%)	1,804 (4.2%)
Other Asian **	28 (7.6%)	643 (1.5%)
African American	37 (9.4%)	6,669 (15.4%)
Total	395	43,209


Source: U.S. Statistical Abstract, 2011 (2009 census data)






** Alaska Native, American Indian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander






3. National Survey: Summary Data

1. How old are you?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Under 16		2.7%	18
16-19		34.6%	228
20-25		55.4%	365
Over 25		7.3%	48
		<i>answered question</i>	659
		<i>skipped question</i>	0

2. Do you live in the U.S.?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		98.2%	647
No		1.8%	12
		<i>answered question</i>	659
		<i>skipped question</i>	0

3. What U.S. state do you live in?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
State:		100.0%	645
		<i>answered question</i>	645
		<i>skipped question</i>	14

4. How often do you go online?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Several times a day		80.4%	455
Almost every day		15.7%	89
At least once a week		3.0%	17
Less than once a week		0.7%	4
Never		0.2%	1
		answered question	566
		skipped question	93

5. Where do you typically access the Internet? Check all that apply.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
At home		92.6%	523
At school		49.0%	277
At work		34.3%	194
At a community center, youth center, or public library		14.9%	84
On my phone or mobile device		43.7%	247
		answered question	565
		skipped question	94

6. How often do you read, watch, or listen to the NEWS?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Several times a day		28.8%	163
Almost every day		39.6%	224
At least once a week		20.5%	116
Less than once a week		9.0%	51
Never		2.1%	12
<i>answered question</i>			566
<i>skipped question</i>			93

7. How often do you do the following?						
	Several times a day	Almost every day	At least once a week	Less than once a week	Never	Response Count
Send or read email	63.7% (360)	22.7% (128)	9.0% (51)	3.0% (17)	1.6% (9)	565
Read web pages	65.3% (367)	22.4% (126)	8.9% (50)	2.3% (13)	1.1% (6)	562
Write your own blog	3.2% (18)	5.2% (29)	9.9% (55)	23.2% (129)	58.5% (326)	557
Watch videos online on sites like YouTube and Hulu	18.9% (106)	33.3% (187)	34.0% (191)	11.9% (67)	2.0% (11)	562
Use social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter	67.3% (379)	22.2% (125)	6.2% (35)	2.3% (13)	2.0% (11)	563
<i>answered question</i>						565
<i>skipped question</i>						94

8. Do you use the Internet to get news or commentary about the following topics?			
	Yes	No	Response Count
Local community news & events	80.8% (378)	19.2% (90)	468
National news & events	87.6% (411)	12.4% (58)	469
International news & events	79.7% (373)	20.3% (95)	468
Environmental issues	72.1% (338)	27.9% (131)	469
Social justice	71.6% (331)	28.4% (131)	462
Education	77.9% (363)	22.1% (103)	466
Arts, culture, & entertainment	89.3% (417)	10.7% (50)	467
Business & the economy	62.3% (289)	37.7% (175)	464
Science & technology	74.0% (341)	26.0% (120)	461
Health & medicine	73.9% (343)	26.1% (121)	464
Politics	72.9% (339)	27.1% (126)	465
Sports	56.8% (260)	43.2% (198)	458
Celebrity news	63.0% (290)	37.0% (170)	460
	<i>answered question</i>		470
	<i>skipped question</i>		189

9. WEBSITES			
Do you use this source?			
	Yes	No	Response Count
	<i>answered question</i>		469
	<i>skipped question</i>		190

9. WEBSITES

A website of a national or local newspaper	77.2% (362)	22.8% (107)	469
A website of a TV news station	57.6% (270)	42.4% (199)	469
A website of a radio news station	38.4% (178)	61.6% (285)	463
A news aggregator like GoogleNews or YahooNews	68.2% (320)	31.8% (149)	469
An international news website such as the BBC or a foreign language news site	53.3% (248)	46.7% (217)	465
A website that focuses on a particular topic, like Politico, Grist, WebMD, or Gawker	53.5% (250)	46.5% (217)	467
A website of a magazine like Mother Jones or Time, or an online magazine like Slate or Salon.com	40.2% (188)	59.8% (280)	468
Video websites like YouTube or comedycentral.com	84.6% (396)	15.4% (72)	468
An individual's blog	50.8% (235)	49.2% (228)	463

How much do you trust the CONTENT of this source?

	Trust	Sometimes trust	Rarely trust	Never trust	Response Count
A website of a national or local newspaper	59.0% (256)	32.5% (141)	5.5% (24)	3.0% (13)	434
A website of a TV news station	40.9% (164)	41.4% (166)	13.5% (54)	4.2% (17)	401
A website of a radio news station	33.1% (118)	44.9% (160)	14.9% (53)	7.0% (25)	356

answered question 469

skipped question 190

9. WEBSITES					
A news aggregator like GoogleNews or YahooNews	39.6% (158)	48.4% (193)	9.5% (38)	2.5% (10)	399
An international news website such as the BBC or a foreign language news site	56.2% (208)	31.4% (116)	6.2% (23)	6.2% (23)	370
A website that focuses on a particular topic, like Politico, Grist, WebMD, or Gawker	31.0% (114)	48.6% (179)	11.7% (43)	8.7% (32)	368
A website of a magazine like Mother Jones or Time, or an online magazine like Slate or Salon.com	28.5% (96)	46.3% (156)	15.7% (53)	9.5% (32)	337
Video websites like YouTube or comedycentral.com	16.2% (71)	47.6% (209)	29.4% (129)	6.8% (30)	439
An individual's blog	8.5% (32)	46.2% (174)	28.4% (107)	17.0% (64)	377
	answered question				469
	skipped question				190





10. SOCIAL NETWORKING			
Do you use this source?			
	Yes	No	Response Count
A news website where users rate stories, like Digg	17.6% (82)	82.4% (385)	467
A news organization that YOU FOLLOW on a social networking site like Facebook or Twitter	52.1% (244)	47.9% (224)	468
	answered question		469
	skipped question		190

10. SOCIAL NETWORKING					
An individual journalist or blogger that YOU FOLLOW on a social networking site like Facebook or Twitter	38.2% (179)		61.8% (289)		468
An organization that YOU FOLLOW on social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter	59.2% (277)		40.8% (191)		468
News stories posted by an individual (including friends and family) that YOU FOLLOW on social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter	68.8% (322)		31.2% (146)		468
How much do you trust the CONTENT of this source?					
	Trust	Sometimes trust	Rarely trust	Never trust	Response Count
A news website where users rate stories, like Digg	7.6% (23)	42.7% (129)	29.8% (90)	19.9% (60)	302
A news organization that YOU FOLLOW on a social networking site like Facebook or Twitter	30.7% (115)	45.6% (171)	14.9% (56)	8.8% (33)	375
An individual journalist or blogger that YOU FOLLOW on a social networking site like Facebook or Twitter	22.0% (76)	44.9% (155)	19.4% (67)	13.6% (47)	345
An organization that YOU FOLLOW on social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter	30.2% (114)	46.9% (177)	14.9% (56)	8.0% (30)	377
News stories posted by an individual (including friends and family) that YOU FOLLOW on social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter	18.1% (75)	56.8% (235)	17.6% (73)	7.5% (31)	414
	answered question				469
	skipped question				190

11. PRINT, TV, and RADIO SOURCES					
Do you use this source?					
	Yes		No		Response Count
A national daily newspaper (like the New York Times)	51.6% (242)		48.4% (227)		469
A television broadcast of a national cable or network news program (like CNN or ABC)	71.4% (335)		28.6% (134)		469
A local newspaper	65.0% (305)		35.0% (164)		469
A community or neighborhood bulletin or newsletter	39.5% (184)		60.5% (282)		466
A radio news and information program	51.9% (243)		48.1% (225)		468
A comedy news program like the Daily Show	58.8% (275)		41.2% (193)		468
How much do you trust the CONTENT of this source?					
	Trust	Sometimes trust	Rarely trust	Never trust	Response Count
A national daily newspaper (like the New York Times)	59.6% (226)	31.7% (120)	5.5% (21)	3.2% (12)	379
A television broadcast of a national cable or network news program (like CNN or ABC)	44.6% (187)	39.6% (166)	11.9% (50)	3.8% (16)	419
A local newspaper	48.8% (195)	41.3% (165)	6.5% (26)	3.5% (14)	400
A community or neighborhood bulletin or newsletter	33.3% (113)	49.0% (166)	12.1% (41)	5.6% (19)	339
A radio news and information program	36.4% (135)	48.0% (178)	11.9% (44)	3.8% (14)	371
	answered question				469
	skipped question				190









11. PRINT, TV, and RADIO SOURCES					
A comedy news program like the Daily Show	31.1% (118)	42.2% (160)	17.9% (68)	8.7% (33)	379
	<i>answered question</i>				469
	<i>skipped question</i>				190



12. Please list some specific online sites where you get news and information.		
		Response Count
		465
	<i>answered question</i>	465
	<i>skipped question</i>	194

13. When you use an online source for news and commentary, which of the following is important to you? Please select one of the following:			
		Response Percent	Response Count
A source with a point of view like yours		12.3%	58
A source with a point of view different from yours		1.7%	8
A source without a specific point of view		19.1%	90
Both sources that are like my point of view AND different from my point of view		66.8%	314
	<i>answered question</i>		470
	<i>skipped question</i>		189

14. When you use online news and commentary sites, how important is it to:					
	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Don't know	Response Count
Make comments on stories	9.9% (41)	37.3% (155)	51.0% (212)	1.9% (8)	416
Learn more about the issue being discussed	57.3% (238)	38.3% (159)	3.9% (16)	0.5% (2)	415
Watch video clips	19.8% (82)	55.9% (232)	23.6% (98)	0.7% (3)	415
Listen to audio clips or podcasts	13.8% (57)	42.9% (177)	41.4% (171)	1.9% (8)	413
Watch live news and events	31.2% (129)	45.7% (189)	21.7% (90)	1.4% (6)	414
Share news stories with others through tools like email, Facebook, or Twitter	27.1% (112)	44.4% (184)	26.8% (111)	1.7% (7)	414
Follow the news site through Facebook or Twitter	15.4% (64)	31.5% (131)	50.0% (208)	3.1% (13)	416
Make a profile to customize content you get on the news site	9.2% (38)	24.6% (102)	60.0% (249)	6.3% (26)	415
See news and information from lots of sites on one webpage (like GoogleNews, YahooNews)	26.6% (110)	43.2% (179)	26.1% (108)	4.1% (17)	414
Learn what are popular, trending, topics like on Twitter	12.3% (51)	32.0% (133)	51.7% (215)	4.1% (17)	416
Find out what other sites are saying about a particular issue	26.7% (110)	50.0% (206)	20.1% (83)	3.2% (13)	412
Rate specific stories	10.7% (44)	25.2% (104)	57.8% (238)	6.3% (26)	412
Access content from your cell phone, Blackberry, or mobile device	32.9% (136)	26.6% (110)	34.6% (143)	5.8% (24)	413
Link to an opportunity to take action, such as sign a petition or donate money	26.4% (109)	43.8% (181)	25.4% (105)	4.4% (18)	413
	answered question				416
	skipped question				243

15. In the past 6 months have you used any of the following features on a news and information website?			
	Yes	No	Response Count
Make comments on stories	44.0% (182)	56.0% (232)	414
Learn more about the issue being discussed	88.2% (366)	11.8% (49)	415
Watch video clips	89.6% (371)	10.4% (43)	414
Listen to audio clips or podcasts	61.1% (251)	38.9% (160)	411
Watch live news and events	75.6% (313)	24.4% (101)	414
Share news stories with others through tools like email, Facebook, or Twitter	73.3% (304)	26.7% (111)	415
Follow the news site through Facebook or Twitter	48.0% (199)	52.0% (216)	415
Make a profile to customize the content you get on the news site	25.4% (105)	74.6% (309)	414
See news and information from lots of sites on one webpage (like GoogleNews, YahooNews)	68.3% (282)	31.7% (131)	413
Learn what are popular, trending, topics like on Twitter	46.9% (194)	53.1% (220)	414
Find out what other sites are saying about a particular issue	68.4% (283)	31.6% (131)	414
Rate specific stories	30.8% (127)	69.2% (286)	413
Access content from your cell phone, Blackberry, or mobile device	56.3% (233)	43.7% (181)	414
Link to an opportunity to take action, such as sign a petition or donate money	53.2% (219)	46.8% (193)	412
	answered question		416
	skipped question		243



16. In general, what format do you prefer for your news and information? Check all that apply.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
In-depth text stories		61.1%	254
Short articles		78.8%	328
Short videos		51.9%	216
Television specials and documentaries		59.1%	246
Photo essays		36.1%	150
Tweets		15.4%	64
Audio podcast		17.3%	72
Editorial or opinion-based articles		41.8%	174
		<i>answered question</i>	416
		<i>skipped question</i>	243








17. Do you have a mobile device (iPhone, Blackberry, or cell phone) that lets you access the Internet?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		65.0%	269
No		35.0%	145
		<i>answered question</i>	414
		<i>skipped question</i>	245




18. Do you ever use your mobile device to do any of the following activities?			
	Yes	No	Response Count
Go online for news and information about current events	52.9% (220)	47.1% (196)	416
Get news alerts sent to your phone or device by text or email	37.4% (155)	62.6% (259)	414
Watch a video	44.9% (186)	55.1% (228)	414
Download an application, or “app”, that allows you to receive news, updates, and information	40.1% (166)	59.9% (248)	414
Text someone about a current event or news story	60.6% (252)	39.4% (164)	416
Receive a text from someone about a current event or news story	60.6% (252)	39.4% (164)	416
Update your social network	55.4% (230)	44.6% (185)	415
	<i>answered question</i>		416
	<i>skipped question</i>		243



19. For each item below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement:					
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Response Count
I am constantly getting news as I do other things online	36.1% (150)	42.7% (177)	17.3% (72)	3.9% (16)	415
I only follow news about topics that interest me	36.2% (150)	43.0% (178)	16.2% (67)	4.6% (19)	414
My friends, family, and co-workers point me to the news I need to know	21.8% (90)	40.3% (166)	26.5% (109)	11.4% (47)	412
	<i>answered question</i>				416
	<i>skipped question</i>				243

19. For each item below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement:					
Satire and humor are effective ways to communicate the news	36.2% (150)	42.0% (174)	18.1% (75)	3.6% (15)	414
I prefer to get news on my mobile device	15.9% (66)	25.1% (104)	28.0% (116)	30.9% (128)	414
I don't pay much attention to the source of my news	4.1% (17)	18.9% (78)	39.0% (161)	38.0% (157)	413
I'm not really interested in news at all	3.4% (14)	13.5% (56)	23.2% (96)	59.9% (248)	414
	<i>answered question</i>				416
	<i>skipped question</i>				243




20. Are there particular causes or issues that you are passionate about and follow in the news? (such as AIDS awareness, climate change, youth empowerment, social justice, etc.).			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		75.0%	309
No		25.0%	103
If Yes, what is the cause or issue?			300
	<i>answered question</i>		412
	<i>skipped question</i>		247





21. In the past 6 months have you been inspired by a video to do any of the following? Check all that apply.			
Share information about the cause or issue online (such as through Facebook, Twitter, email, blogs, texting)		64.5%	198
Learn more about the topic or issue		74.9%	230
Donate money yourself to a cause or issue		26.1%	80
Help others fundraise for a cause or issue		22.8%	70
Volunteer your time at a local organization, public event, or campaign		32.9%	101
Change your perspective on a topic or issue		50.5%	155
No, I have not been inspired by a video		16.9%	52
	answered question		307
	skipped question		352








22. Why did the video inspire you? Check all that apply.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Good video content and quality		66.8%	167
The issue covered was relevant to my personal life		64.8%	162
It was a local issue I care about		51.6%	129
	answered question		250
	skipped question		409

22. Why did the video inspire you? Check all that apply.			
It was a global issue I care about		64.4%	161
It gave me a chance to be a part of something bigger than myself		44.4%	111
	answered question		250
	skipped question		409

23. What was the video about?		
		Response Count
		208
	answered question	208
	skipped question	451

24. In the past 6 months have you been inspired by a specific news story to do any of the following? Check all that apply.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Share information about the cause or issue online (such as through Facebook, Twitter, email, blogs, texting)		65.4%	197
Learn more about the topic or issue		72.1%	217
Donate money yourself to a cause or issue		23.9%	72
	answered question		301
	skipped question		358

24. In the past 6 months have you been inspired by a specific news story to do any of the following? Check all that apply.			
Help others fundraise for a cause or issue		20.6%	62
Volunteer your time at a local organization, public event, or campaign		26.9%	81
Change your perspective on a topic or issue		40.2%	121
No, I have not been inspired by a news story		16.3%	49
	answered question		301
	skipped question		358

25. Why did the news story inspire you? Check all that apply.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Depth of content		69.5%	173
High quality reporting		48.6%	121
The story used video		27.3%	68
The issue covered was relevant to my personal life		53.8%	134
It was a local issue I care about		45.4%	113
It was a global issue I care about		55.8%	139
It gave me a chance to be a part of something bigger than myself		31.7%	79
	answered question		249
	skipped question		410

26. What was the story about?		
		Response Count
		194
	<i>answered question</i>	194
	<i>skipped question</i>	465


27. Is there something else important about how you get, use, or share news that you want to tell us?		
		Response Count
		183
	<i>answered question</i>	183
	<i>skipped question</i>	476






28. How do you identify yourself? Please check all that apply.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
African-American/Black (non-hispanic)	<input type="checkbox"/>	9.4%	37
Caucasian/White (non-hispanic)	<input type="checkbox"/>	55.4%	219
American Indian or Alaskan Native	<input type="checkbox"/>	4.1%	16
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.0%	12
Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>	16.2%	64
Hispanic or Latino	<input type="checkbox"/>	17.2%	68
	<i>answered question</i>		395
	<i>skipped question</i>		264




28. How do you identify yourself? Please check all that apply.			
I'd rather not say	<input type="checkbox"/>	5.3%	21
Other (please specify)			24
answered question			395
skipped question			264




29. What is your best guess of your household income?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Less than \$35,000 per year	<input type="checkbox"/>	49.1%	194
\$35,000 - \$50,000 per year	<input type="checkbox"/>	16.5%	65
\$50,000 - \$75,000 per year	<input type="checkbox"/>	13.9%	55
\$75,000 - \$90,000 per year	<input type="checkbox"/>	6.6%	26
More than \$90,000 per year	<input type="checkbox"/>	13.9%	55
answered question			395
skipped question			264




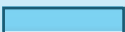


30. Are you currently attending or enrolled in school?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, full time	<input type="checkbox"/>	62.5%	247
Yes, part time	<input type="checkbox"/>	6.8%	27
answered question			395
skipped question			264

30. Are you currently attending or enrolled in school?			
No, I am not currently attending school		30.6%	121
	answered question		395
	skipped question		264

31. What kind of school are you enrolled in?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
High School		18.2%	72
Technical, vocational, or trade school		0.3%	1
Community or junior college		7.3%	29
College or university		44.1%	174
I am not currently attending school		30.1%	119
	answered question		395
	skipped question		264

32. What is the last grade or class you COMPLETED in school?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Currently in high school		18.0%	71
High school graduate, Grade 12, or GED certificate		16.5%	65
Business, technical, or vocational school AFTER high school		1.5%	6
	answered question		395
	skipped question		264




32. What is the last grade or class you COMPLETED in school?			
Some college or university work, but no four-year degree		31.9%	126
College or university graduate (BA, BS or other four-year degree received)		28.4%	112
Post graduate or professional (i.e. Master's or Ph.D., or Business, Law or Medical School degree)		3.8%	15
	answered question		395
	skipped question		264

33. What is the highest grade or class YOUR MOTHER COMPLETED in school?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Did not complete high school		11.1%	44
High school graduate, Grade 12, or GED certificate		17.0%	67
Business, technical, or vocational school AFTER high school		5.6%	22
Some college or university work, but no four-year degree		21.8%	86
College or university graduate (BA, BS or other four-year degree received)		26.8%	106
Post graduate or professional (i.e. Master's or Ph.D., or Business, Law or Medical School degree)		17.7%	70
	answered question		395
	skipped question		264

34. Which of the following best describes your current work situation?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
I don't have a paying job	<div></div>	38.0%	150
I work part-time for pay	<div></div>	32.9%	130
I work full-time for pay	<div></div>	24.6%	97
I am self-employed	<div></div>	4.6%	18
		<i>answered question</i>	395
		<i>skipped question</i>	264

35. In order to be eligible for the survey prizes, you MUST provide the following information (your survey responses will remain confidential):			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Name:	<div></div>	99.7%	355
Email Address:	<div></div>	99.4%	354
Phone Number:	<div></div>	94.4%	336
		<i>answered question</i>	356
		<i>skipped question</i>	303

36. How did you find out about this survey?		
		363
	<i>answered question</i>	363
	<i>skipped question</i>	296

37. What is your gender?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Transgender		0.5%	2
Female		69.1%	273
Male		30.4%	120
		<i>answered question</i>	395
		<i>skipped question</i>	264

4. Usability Protocol

The following usability questions were administered to 9 users in March 2011 to refine and improve features and design elements of the website.

Usability Testing Script for LinkTV News Alpha V1.0

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Age:

Gender:

Referral:

BEFORE INTERVIEW

- Check audio and video functionality on computer
- Ensure that computer is logged in
- Clear cookies

INTRODUCTION

- Thanks for coming. Before we start, I want to walk through a couple of key points about today's session
- This interview will take about 45 minutes.
- Your feedback will be anonymous.
- In this session, you'll be asked to review a website that is still in development, so there may be some minor bugs. The goal of this session is to learn how to improve the site prior to launch. So, your feedback is very important to us.
- I'll ask you a series of questions because we want to see if our site works but we're also very interested in what you think about the site, such as what you like, dislike, or find confusing. There are no right or wrong answers, so please be honest and don't tell me what you think I want to hear. I'm really interested in what you think.
- While you are exploring the site, please talk us through everything you are doing and describe your impressions. In short, we'd like you to think out loud, even if you are feeling confused or unsure. Please use your mouse to point to areas on the screen where you are focusing.
- Some of what we will ask you to do may seem very obvious, but that's one of the things we're looking for: if it's obvious, then the site is doing its job.
- However, if something isn't obvious or is confusing, unfortunately

we can't answer questions or show you how to do tasks. We want to see if you are able to work things out without instruction because, if you can't, the site isn't doing its job.

- Please act like you would at home or the office or wherever you normally access the web. What we mean by that is if you ever get to the point where you would normally give up on the task, please let us know.

Any questions before we move on?

FRONT PAGE

1. Please spend a minute or two to familiarize yourself with the site and start having a look around.
2. What are your initial impressions?
3. Are you interested in any of the main stories?
4. Enough text in headlines vs images? Too much? Just enough?
5. What do you think of the green "watch" icon?
6. What do you think the "Live Pages" are?
7. What do you think the "Trending Topics" are?
8. Are you interested in the "Live Pages" or "Trending Topics"?
9. Are you interested in the "As Reported Elsewhere" area?
10. Can you find more videos on this page?
11. Do you find any of the stories on the bottom of the page interesting?
12. What do you think of the number of stories?
13. Is the entire front page too big, too small, or just right?
14. Do you think there is anything missing or anything you would add?

VIDEO PLAYER PAGE

1. Can you play the main video?
2. What do you think of the suggested links on the right hand side?
 1. Are the suggestions related?
 2. Are they interesting?
 3. Just noise?
3. Are the "Live Pages" interesting and relevant?
4. Can you figure out how to add this to Facebook?
 1. Would you normally add something like this to your Facebook feed?
5. Can you figure out how to email this?
 1. Would you email this?
6. Can you find "Related Videos"?
 1. Are they relevant?

2. Would you select any? If so, why?
3. Is the image quality strong enough?
4. If there is a pixelated image, does that detract from the entire experience? If so, how badly?
5. Where do you think these videos come from?
6. Do you know or care that some of these are internal, some external?
7. Can you tell if any of these are external?
7. Can you find related articles?
 1. Are they related?
 2. Interesting?
 3. Or is this entire column noise?
8. Do you use the full-screen button? What about full-width button?
9. Do you understand that elements of this page are updated live? If not, any ideas on why not?
10. Is there anything missing from this page that you'd expect or like to see?
11. What about comments, do you ever use them? Are you missing them here?
12. Do you miss something telling you what's hot on this page?

LIVE PAGE

1. What do you think this page is for?
2. Is the written description at the top of the page useful?
 1. What do you think about the amount of text on this page? Too much, too little, just right?
3. Where do the videos come from?
4. Are you interested in any of the videos?
5. Would you think that the video list updates?
6. Can you find the "Narrow By" section? What do you think it does?

BASELINE USAGE QUESTIONS

1. Do you pay attention to the news?
2. If so, how frequently?
3. If so, how do you get your news?
 1. Internet
 2. Mobile
 3. Print
 4. Radio
 5. TV
4. What type of news do you read?
 1. Entertainment

2. Gossip
3. Local
4. National
5. Sports
5. How much time do you think you spend getting news daily and weekly?
6. Which media creators, sites, publications do you use?
7. What do you use for social networking?
 1. Facebook?
 2. Twitter
 3. Email
 4. SMS
 5. Other
8. How much time do you use on social media daily/weekly?

5. User Group Feedback Discussion

As a final opportunity for feedback on the site, we convened two groups of users by age group (16–19 years and 20–25 years) to discuss the site’s potential value in participants’ news media practices and routines and gather reactions to decisions made about features and other design elements. These discussions were open, loosely structured, and lasted about 90 minutes.

LINKTV/GLOBAL NEWS PLATFORM

User Groups

April 25, 2011

4:30-6pm (16–19 years)

6:30-8pm (20–25 years)

1. Welcome and Introductions (5 mins)

2. General News Media Practices (15 mins)

Tell me how you generally get your news

- What media, sources do you use? Why? When?
- Do you use social media for news and information? How? Why?

What kind of news do you pay attention to?

- Can you give me an example of a story you followed? How?
- How do you become aware of news stories, issues?

3. Tour of Link News Site (15 mins)

(Group is given a tour of the site. Perhaps they can begin exploring the site as soon as they arrive and sign in.)

4. Features: Effectiveness, Value, Use (40 mins)

What are your initial reactions to this site?

What parts of the site stand out for you or appeal to you? Why?

- How can you imagine using this feature/attribute for news? Can you give me a specific example? Can you think of a time recently when this would have been helpful?

How effective is the Front Page in helping you learn about news? How does it help you interact with news in the ways that you want to?

How does _____ help you find news, makes sense of news, share news? Can you tell me how you might use these features?

- Explore Live Pages (is entry from here confusing?)
- Related Video
- Articles from Around the Web
- Take Action (probe for value, relevance)

5. Impact (15 mins)

How would this news site change the ways you find news, share news, or make sense of the news?

- Can you give me a specific example?
- What specific feature or attribute would change your news practice?

Appendix B

Link News: Design Features and Usability

Link News was launched as a private alpha site in March 2011. Scripted usability tests were then conducted to assess how young people navigated and perceived the site and its features. These tests were followed up with two focus groups that examined both the features of the site, and how the site might intersect with the news practice of young people.

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

Generally young people had a positive impression of the site in both research environments. Focus group participants in the 20-25 year old age range were struck by the lack of advertising, and noticed that there was no celebrity gossip or entertainment news. These were seen as very positive differentiators. Focus group participants were able to easily articulate the aim of the site based on its content and tag line. They especially appreciated the Wikipedia-like information that was presented on topic pages, and which was reproduced in capsule form on the video player page.

CONTENT

Focus group participants felt that the content being presented on the site was serious and important, which gave them a positive overall impression. That said, they wanted additional content with more universal appeal, such as videos about the environment, science, or culture. Usability participants commented that the site was heavy on Middle Eastern news, but this was addressed before the focus groups took place. All research indicated that the content was seen as being quite negative and depressing, often covering conflict or human rights issues. Participants wanted those stories to be covered, but also wanted other types of content to explore.

Participants' definition of news was not always confined to breaking stories, which fit with prior research around issue-based exploration. For example, around a video about the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant disaster, they were highly appreciative of longer pieces about Chernobyl, the science of nuclear energy, and other investigative reports

about nuclear power and the environment. Giving these breaking stories context is a way to make them more relevant to youth by connecting them to issues like the environment that affect their own lives.

HOME PAGE DESIGN AND NAVIGATION

During the usability tests several users commented on the white feel of the home page. In both research environments there was feedback that “not enough was going on” and that the top of the page felt sparse or unfinished. It was unclear in usability testing if this was because there was not enough content or interactivity, or if it was a visual design issue. Subsequent focus group testing revealed several issues:

(i) Users who weren’t interested in any of the content on the home page didn’t know where to go next. They didn’t feel committed enough to any displayed topic, such as an event or country, for that to be their next step. When comparing the site to other sites they realized what was missing: broad categories such as “world,” “politics,” “U.S.,” etc., which facilitate browsing. Such navigation not only offers users the chance to find more content, but also gives them a sense of the depth of the site. It makes the site feel more real and professional to them. These menus also appear at the top of the page, adding another layer of interactivity there.

The solution to this issue was to add top navigation, which also offers an opportunity to express the site’s identity more clearly through the choice of categories. Clicking on a category takes the user to a page with identical design to the home page, but filled with content from that category. Categories chosen for testing were World/Front Page, U.S., Environment, Human Rights, Culture, Documentaries, and Link TV Series. These offered users the chance to explore issues (Environment, Human Rights), lighter content (Culture), and in-depth supporting content (Documentaries) from the outset.

(ii) Users seemed to expect visual groupings of content on the home page. There was a sense that the site was offering them a set of disparate pieces of content, rather than different visual gatherings of content. This tied into the issue of white space, and that they wanted a clearer primary place for their eye to go. This was addressed by adding a subtle background color and bringing groups of visual elements closer together. Headings were also added to the content groupings to separate them.

(iii) Users responded strongly to the images associated with the news. In many cases these images were being covered by semitransparent overlays. In the case of the main story, the headline now appears below

the image in stark white over black, influenced by some design elements of CNN.com and The Huffington Post. This also made the content an unusual shape, breaking away from the standard 16:9 or 4:3 of video stills, and thus giving the user pause as they scan the page, making the featured space stickier.

Also, the three supporting images were moved closer together. This made the top four items a clear visual block. The headline overlays on the secondary stories were made smaller to reveal more of the photograph behind.

(iv) Users didn't understand how much of the content underneath the main featured item was actually related to that item, especially when it came to the "Explore Topics" and "Trending Topics" areas. In revised designs, this distinction was made clearer through visual separation and the use of stronger headings.

(v) The carousel on the bottom of the home page performed well in all testing so was left intact.

TAKING ACTION

Young people responded well to the idea of taking action around the news. They view this as a way to counter the helplessness they feel over depressing news stories. Taking action is seen as a way to localize the story by making it more a part of the user's life. Unfortunately, this is the area on Link News where the automated related content tools perform the poorest. There are few "social action" APIs (application programming interfaces) that have the breadth of content needed to consistently fill this role. Those that do exist emphasize campaigns over evergreen links such as to Amnesty International, the Red Cross, or Doctors Without Borders. However, because young people have such a strong interest in this area, the decision was made to emphasize actions on the video player page through a highlighted section.

TOPICS AND "LIVE" PAGES

Usability testing revealed that users didn't understand the concept of "Live Pages." Before focus group testing, the "Live Page" nomenclature was replaced with the term "Topic." This was clearer to users. Once they arrived on topics pages, the pages were richer than expected. Users in both studies responded well to the Wikipedia-like feeling of these pages. Often the news is about subjects or geographic areas users were not familiar with, and they felt more likely to explore videos about those topics once they had read the text.

Focus group participants in the 20– to 25-year-old demographic had a strikingly positive reaction to the use of Wikipedia-like information throughout the site, and brought it up repeatedly as something that made the site different and appealing to them. With that in mind, the capsule information has been made more dominant throughout.

VIDEO PLAYER PAGE

The video player page was quite straightforward to users, and they understood how to use the player and its features, as well as how to access the related content. The area that allows users to navigate between chapters was missed by most users, and the “Next Suggested” feature to the right of the player was also missed. Some users didn’t understand why the Next Suggested feature replicated the content found below the video player, as they’re comfortable with quickly scanning a whole page. The decision was made to rework the design of the player page to improve access to the chapters, and to dedicate more of the Next Suggested area to Wikipedia-like descriptions of topics covered in the video. The heading was also changed to “Put in Context,” echoing how it was described by focus group participants.

INTERNAL VIDEOS VS. EXTERNAL VIDEOS

In the alpha release, internal videos that play on the Link News site itself and external videos that play in a new window on different sites (such as CNN.com) were combined in a single list and only differentiated through small icons. Usability testers found this confusing and couldn’t predict when a piece of content would lead them offsite. This was addressed before the focus groups by separating the external content and titling it “Related Videos Around the Web.” Focus group participants understood what would happen when these items were clicked on, so this change was successful.

COMMENTING

Commenting on news was a low priority for survey participants. This was confirmed by usability testing participants who did not miss commenting as a feature. However, focus group participants did notice the lack of commenting and expressed a desire to read comments, if not to actively contribute to them. The desirability of this feature requires further research.